OlyDSA SNS Course Outline

Unit 1 - Introduction

1.1 What is Capitalism?

Our first session will address the question What is Capitalism? Democratic socialism is about fighting for a better world, but it is essential that we understand where we start from and the problems with our current society before we can fix them.

Readings

Understanding Capitalism by Vivek Chibber, pg 11-25
"Six Point on Class" by Michael Zweig
"Not in Labor" interview with Jenny Brown, by Liza Featherstone

Key Concepts/Questions

What does life under capitalism look like?
Markets/Commodification (especially of labor)
Class
Reproductive Labor

1.2 What is Socialism?

This lesson will be focused around defining democratic socialism, explaining its rise in popularity over the past four years, and dispelling common myths and misconceptions around democratic socialism.

Readings

Socialism: Converting Hysterical Misery into Ordinary Unhappiness by Corey Robin
Socialists Think by Asad Haider
Democratic Socialism, Explained by a Democratic Socialist by Meagan Day
Building Socialism from Below: Popular Power and the State by Ben Tarnoff

Watchings

Do Communists have Better Sex? a documentary by Andre Meier

Key Concepts/Questions

Decommodification

1.3 Democratic Socialist Strategy

We know that the problem is capitalism. We know that the answer is socialism. But how do we get there? This is an open question, and within DSA we have lively and productive disagreements about the answers, but this presentation will survey the fundamental agreements and some of the most significant particular lines of thinking.

Readings

Why Socialists Should Fight for Structural Reforms by Meagan Day
The Political Revolution Goes to Work by Jane Slaughter
Building a Mass Socialist Party by Sam Gindin
Picking up the Threads of Struggle (audio version and transcript) an interview with Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor by Dan Denvir

Key Concepts/Questions

Why is the working class central to socialist politics?

Unit 2 - History

2.1 Beginnings: Socialism in the 19th Century

This session will open our three-session course on socialist history, beginning with the origins of modern socialism in the 19th century, the development of and conflicts between different strategies, and the crisis in the Socialist International caused by the First World War. The next two sessions will address the history of 20th Century Communism and the history of 20th Century Social Democracy.

Readings

The Proud Tower (Chapter 8: The Socialists), by Barbara Tuchman: Narrative history of pre-war Europe aimed at a general audience, this book is a great introduction to the period. Written by a non-socialist. Free Download.

Forging Democracy (Part I: Making Democracy Social), by Geoff Eley (2002): Mainstream academic history of the European left 1850-2000. Author is left-sympathetic, being a member of Democracy for America and donating to Bernie Sanders and Mike Gravel. Free Download.

Key Concepts/Questions

2.2 Revolution: Communism in the 20th Century

This session will continue our three-session course on the history of socialism. This course will discuss the history of communism in the 20th century.

Readings

The Principles of Communism, Frederick Engels (1847):

Economics and Politics in the Era of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, V.I. Lenin (1919):

Toward a Critical Reassessment of Maoism, Khalil Hassan, (Freedom Road 2003)

What Maoism Actually Stood For, Max Elbaum (2004):

The Cuban Revolution and Marxist Theory, Mage, Wohlforth and Robertson (1960):

Extra readings to skim if you have time:

*Marxism-Leninism (long but definitely worth a skim):

*Socialism with Chinese Characteristics (skim):

*Communist Party USA (skim):

The World Revolution That Wasn't, Loren Balhorn (Jacobin 2019):

Key Concepts/Questions

2.3 Reform: Social Democracy in the 20th Century

This session will conclude our three-session course on the history of socialism. This course will discuss the history of social democracy in the 20th century. This tradition produced some of the most humane societies the world has ever seen in Northern Europe, yet is often regarded as a failure by many on the Left. What are we talking about when we say 'social democracy'? How have 20th century social democrats understood their politics? What can democratic socialists in the 21st century learn from this experience?

Readings

“Cockblocked by the Welfare State” by Katie Baker
"Why Socialists Should Fight for Structural Reforms" by Meagan Day (a refresher from our Socialist Strategy discussion)
"Beyond Social Democracy" by Ralph Milliband and Marcel Liebman

Watching

The Spirit of '45, documentary by Ken Loach on the accomplishments of the British Labour Party after WWII

Extended Reading

Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism by Gøsta Esping-Andersen

The Struggle for Economic Democracy in Sweden by Gregg Olsen (hard to find; I have a copy to lend)

"The Coup in Chile" by Ralph Milliband

Extended Watching

A Very British Coup, a three-part BBC miniseries based on a novel of the same name by British Labour politician Chris Mullins about the election, and subsequent (what we would now call) deep state opposition to a hard left prime minister. Mullins, a member of the Socialist Campaign Group with Tony Benn and Jeremy Corbyn, based his novel on the very real consideration of a coup against Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson during the 1970s. Also Episode 2 and Episode 3.

The Battle of Chile a documentary by Patricio Guzman about the coup against the elected Socialist President Salvador Allende. Also, Part 2 and Part 3.

Key Concepts/Questions

Social democracy won major advances. What methods did they use, and could these methods carry the struggle to the defeat of capitalism and beyond? How are these methods relevant today?

Unit 3 -